



Recycled Water: Good Enough to Drink?

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, April 27, 2009

The City Council discussed one of the world's most precious resources last week; water. The council had its annual meeting with the Santa Clara Valley Water District. In the past, the two organizations have had some turbulent conversations; however, at this meeting we were all on the same [page about conservation](#) and the future supply of water.

Half of our water is imported from the Delta and Hetch Hetchy. Imported resources come with challenges, since you cannot always count on imports. A prime example is the 1970's oil embargo.

San Jose has a facility that produces clean water. Not out of the ground but from what you and I flush, use in the sink and shower. I mentioned the facility and the opportunity for you to tour it [in a past blog](#). Less than 1 percent of the water on this planet is available as fresh water. The water we do have is the same water used over and over again. The Water Pollution Control Plant allows San Jose to control its destiny by producing this scarce resource.

We built this facility to comply with the Federal Clean Water Act so that water discharge to the bay is clean, not contaminated. Over time, we have built purple pipes to distinguish the water supply. Purple pipes transport recycled water to industrial users for large projects like North San Jose and the New City Hall. To extend purple pipes to every home in San Jose for landscaping would take a long time and lots of money.

We are in the midst of approving a new agreement with the Water District where we will provide recycled water. We would also jointly fund future expansion of the Water Pollution Control Plant. The clean water that would be supplied to the Water District could be used to do stream-flow augmentation so that our creeks could have more water flowing in them. Another option is to pump the clean recycled water to the groundwater recharge ponds. Here, the recycled water would be diluted with rainwater and then percolate in the ponds and pick up all those natural minerals. Some time later the water would be pumped out of the ground and flow to our faucets to shower, cook and drink.

Some find the idea of drinking recycled water inconceivable. However, it is already done in Orange County, with 2.3M customers, and Singapore.

I believe that in my lifetime we will see wars over water supply in addition to the cost of water rising for the consumer. At the local level we should be planning to allow more options for our future that keep water in mind.

Water supply is one of the reasons I believe that the city of San Jose should build less housing. In the General Plan 2040 Task Force we have interest groups advocating for as many as 180,000 new housing units. Some of the Task Force members including myself want to see lower housing numbers—around 70,000. Let's save the water for jobs and new industries.

Would you be open to drinking recycled water in the future that is cleaned by micro filtration, reverse osmosis, UV light and other advanced treatments? In the Orange County facility, they have a tour that starts off showing waste water coming into the plant and then all the steps it goes through. Visitors can see and drink the clean water at the end. I myself have not visited the Orange County facility but would like to do so in the near future. In the meantime [here is a YouTube link](#) about the Orange County facility.

Related to water this past Saturday, a group chose to clean a portion of the Los Gatos Creek trail in conjunction with the city of San Jose Great American Litter Pick Up. This small group of volunteers did a great job cleaning up the creek by filling over 50 bags with trash, removing 11 shopping carts and painting out graffiti. Shout out to some of the hard working volunteers: Ed Rast, David Dearborn, Jack Nadeau, Robert Mulvany, Martin Delson among others.

Finally, a friendly reminder that I will be hosting the Concord Coalition on Monday 4, 7PM at City Hall Council Chambers for a showing of the movie I.O.U.S.A. Please RSVP to Pierluigi.Oliverio@SanJoseCA.gov

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